

Anna Kuell

Professor Bridgett Wagner

AMS 263: The Rhetorical Power of Popular Music

18 February 2023

Remix Project Reflection

To some, it may seem that Oliva Rodrigo came into stardom overnight. Her debut album, *SOUR*, was released in May 2021 and achieved levels of praise that very few artists receive for their early work. Eventually, it even earned her a Grammy for the best new artist. But, in a more legitimate sense, Rodrigo has been a performer since day one. From acting in school theater productions; to her first professional acting job in an Old Navy advertisement; to starring in an American Girl movie; to Dizneys' Bizardvark; to being cast as a main charter on Disney+'s High School Musical: The Musical: The Series, Rodrigo has always had a passion for the stage (Shafer). The release of *SOUR* was simply what that propelled her career into the A-list spotlight.

SOUR was immediately met with critical acclaim. The 11-track album was praised as “remarkably potent” and “flawless” (Carras). Music critic Mikael Wood wrote for the Los Angeles Times:

You do not need to know anything about Rodrigo's life — OK, Rodrigo's lives — to enjoy the record, which uses shapely melodies and crafty textures to deliver stories about the emotional trials of late teen hood. (Qtd. In Carras).

SOUR authentically and with a striking level of self-awareness taps into common experiences of the modern teenager, prompting themes of heartbreak, jealousy, and adolescence.

The power of relatability, identification, and Rodrigo's ethos made *SOUR* a groundbreaking piece of music. Quickly, Rodrigo amassed a large, passionate fan base. Her talent, catchy lyricism, and authenticity caused Gen Z to crown her their new 'it girl' (Alami). Overwhelmingly, *SOUR* resonated with teenage girls. Beyond the music, Rodrigo's fashion and personal style began to influence the fashion and personal styles of teen girls across the country.

For my remix project, I have chosen to create a short participatory zine, or booklet, based on the aesthetic and lyrics of Olivia Rodrigo's *SOUR*. I was inspired by the concept of 'burn after writing' and 'Coke or Pepsi' books that were popular in the 2000s, an era in which Rodrigo stylistically dabbles in.

I have adapted this idea to appeal to Rodrigo's main demographic, teenage girls. One way I plan to stay consistent with Rodrigo's appeal and aesthetic is through abbreviation. Abbreviated words are commonly used online by Gen Z and are seen in the title of several of Rodrigo's tracks (I.e., 'good 4 u' and 'hope ur ok.') Rodrigo's intentional misuse of capitalization and spelling asserts an air of inhabited casualness that allows her to avoid any threats of inauthenticity. She embraces her identity as Generation Z by exhibiting the generation's unique trends and allures. This is something I emulate in my remix.

Additionally, Rodrigo is praised for the engaging way she interacts with her fans. Take, for example, the *Sour Prom*. *Sour Prom* is a 27-minute-long live concert film directed by Kimblery Stuckwisch and Toby L. in which Rodrigo surprised real-life fans of hers by inviting them to attend her *SOUR* themed prom (Paul). Based on this popular feature of her fan base, I am aiming to make my remix as participatory as possible. For example, it will include prompts, fill in the blanks, and small tasks that relate to messaging in *SOUR*.

Above all my project is designed to encourage participation, publication, and conversation. Hopefully, Rodrigos fans (aptly called “Livies”) would pick up this booklet, complete its tasks and conversate with other Livies. In this way, my project remixes *SOUR* by achieving the same relatability and uniting environment that the album does takes it on in a different medium.

Works Cited

- Alami, Eman. "Is Olivia Rodrigo Music's Latest IT-Girl?" *CR Fashion*, 14 May 2021.
<https://crfashionbook.com/celebrity-a36432813-is-olivia-rodrigo-musics-latest-it-girl/>
- Carras, Christi. "Olivia Rodrigo Does Not Miss. All These 'Sour' Reviews are Here to Prove it." *Los Angeles Times*, 21 May 2021. <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/music/story/2021-05-21/olivia-rodrigo-sour-review-roundup-album>
- Paul, Larisha. "'Not the Typical High School Story': Inside the Making of Olivia Rodrigo's Concert Film 'Sour Prom.'" *Billboard*. 13 July 2021.
<https://www.billboard.com/music/pop/olivia-rodrigo-sour-prom-making-of-9600048/>
- Rodrigo, Olivia. "*SOUR*." Geffen Records, 21 May 2021.
- Shafer, Ellise. "From Disney to 'Drivers License: Inside Olivia Rodrigo's Musical Journey to Become the Voice of Her Generation.'" *Variety*, 11 Aug. 2021,
<https://variety.com/2021/music/news/olivia-rodrigo-drivers-license-sour-high-school-musical-1235038112/>